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## **Pentagon signs up for water cleanup**

***Defense Dept. agrees to help area agencies with perchlorate***

By NAOMI KRESGE, Staff Writer

**RANCHO CUCAMONGA** - The Department of Defense agreed for the first time Friday to work with Inland Empire water agencies to help clean up groundwater contaminated with perchlorate.

While the agreement does not mean the Defense Department has accepted liability for the problem of rocket fuel in the water that has closed 20 wells in Rialto, Fontana and Colton, it does mean it will help pay for the cleanup.

Water officials called the agreement a groundbreaking and historic move toward cooperation between the federal agency that arguably caused the perchlorate problem and the local agencies whose water supply is shrinking because of it.

"It shows a willingness that is really new to the Inland Empire," said Cucamonga County Water District President Robert Neufeld, one of the five signers of the agreement.

The agreement calls for agencies to combine "technical, financial, environmental and legislative resources" to identify and clean up areas contaminated with perchlorate. It was signed by Neufeld, state Sen. Nell Soto, D-Ontario, John Woodley Jr., the Defense Department's assistant undersecretary for the environment and representatives from the Fontana Water Co. and West Valley Water District.

The Department of Defense hopes to formalize the agreement by Aug. 1, Woodley said, but he would not say how much money the department might commit.

The department might add the project to its existing environmental restoration program, he said, which runs on a \$2 billion annual budget.

"We expect the lessons learned here to be used across the country," Woodley said.

Since detection methods became advanced enough to find the chemical at low concentrations in 1997, perchlorate has been found in 20 states and 329 drinking water sources in California. Linked to thyroid problems in adults and attention deficit disorder in children exposed in the womb, the rocket fuel component affects young children most strongly.

The contamination is especially extensive in the Inland Empire, a favorite site for defense contractors because of its open spaces and proximity to Los Angeles.

"This is a real breakthrough. This would be a godsend if the Department of Defense could come in and do the kinds of studies that need to be done," Rialto representative Susan Treger said. "If they could come up with a way to do this that's cost-efficient, it would save the country billions of dollars."

Treger said her city will announce a water shortage emergency on Tuesday, due in part to the perchlorate contamination that has closed down a number of its wells.

The Santa Ana Regional Quality Control Board has already issued a cleanup order to the Army Corps of Engineers related to local contamination, and water board Assistant Executive Officer Kurt Berchtold said Friday it will be important to follow words with actions.

"This is an important breakthrough, but it's going to take a lot of work to get from this document to reach a solution," Berchtold said.

Although many of the water officials in attendance when the agreement was announced Friday had no idea the document was being developed, Woodley said all other local agencies are free to sign on.